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ABSTRACT

Being 1 of 4 publications dealing with the effects of population decline on rural Iowa counties, this study was published in 1962 as part of a larger study done under the auspices of the North Central Region Subcommittee on Population Research. The effects of out-migration on school systems in Greene County are described, and school history, movements toward school reorganization, enrollment effects, student-teacher ratios, and problems noted from interviews conducted with personnel in 3 school systems are discussed. Data tables provide statistics for factors studied, and a selected bibliography is presented for the benefit of those who may wish to gain better appreciation of the regional population situation and the results of migration upon counties with differing industrial and agricultural conditions. (SW)

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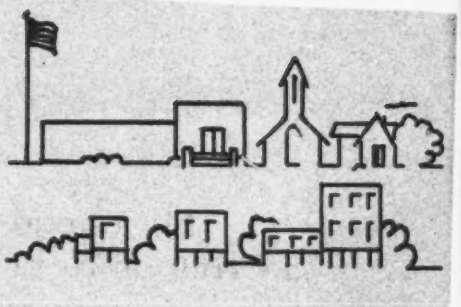
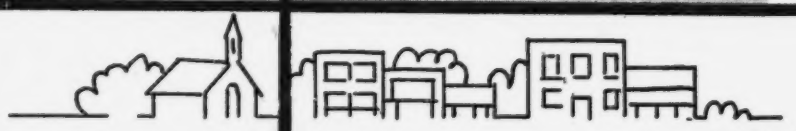


THE IMPACT OF POPULATION CHANGE ON RURAL COMMUNITY LIFE



THE SCHOOL SYSTEM

Iowa State University of Science and Technology
Cooperative Extension Service Soc. 6
Ames, Iowa

In Cooperation with the
North Central Region Sub-committee on Population (NC - 18)
November, 1962

RC004181

BACKGROUND

This is one of four publications dealing with the effects of population decline on rural Iowa counties. The publications are summaries of reports from a 6-year study in Greene County conducted by the Department of Economics and Sociology, Iowa State University.

The Greene County study was part of a larger study done under the auspices of the North Central Region Subcommittee on Population Research. The publications were prepared under the guidance of W. Bauder, J. Doerflinger, Wm. Kenkel and R. Klietsch and were based on the working papers of R. Wakely, A. Russel and C. Mulford.

* * * *

Like many Iowa counties, Greene County is predominantly rural. It has a high level of living but little manufacturing.

Over the years, technology has reduced the need for agricultural labor, and young families in particular have been leaving the farms. Since the county offers few major employment opportunities outside agriculture, the result has been net out-migration and population decline. Thus Greene County faces the need for adjusting community institutions and services to a declining population.

Greene County is typical of counties in Iowa and other cornbelt states that have experienced heavy out-migration, have low employment in manufacturing and have high farm operator level of living.

Of the 99 Iowa counties, 83.8 per cent in 1950 and 76.8 per cent in 1960 are characterized by high out-migration, high farm operator level of living and low manufacturing based on state averages. Most of these counties are located in the central and northern parts of the state.

Greene County farms generally concentrate on the cash grains and livestock, in that order. There is little dairy farming or poultry production.

The settlement of Greene County was slow until after the Civil War. Then population shot up, climaxing around 1900 with a total population of 17,820. During the next 10 years population dropped, but gradually gained again from 1910 to 1940. The current decline began about then as population fell from 15,544 in 1940 to 14,379 in 1960.

Jefferson, the county seat, was the only community in the county to gain population in the last 20 years. All other towns suffered losses.

THE IMPACT OF POPULATION CHANGE ON RURAL COMMUNITY LIFE

. . . The School System

Prepared by Ronald G. Klietsch

Education occupies a vital position in American community life. The school is a symbol. It reflects a community's highest held values and passes on its cultural, technological and spiritual heritage.

Institutions such as the school are sensitive to changes in population which supports them. In the Greene County study it was important to find out how the county's schools reacted to such a change--out-migration and a decline in school age population.

Basically, these are the effects of out-migration noted in the study:

(1) Over time, out-migration reduced the need for many dispersed, rural school systems. But communities reacted only gradually, almost hesitantly, to this new situation.

(2) Population decline aggravated existing school problems. Among them were classroom and physical plant needs, additions to teaching staffs, financial difficulties and school-community relations.

(3) The county's communities showed a lack of initiative, an almost passive attitude, in solving school problems until prompted by outside influences.

(4) The county has become increasingly dependent on state and federal agencies for guidance and support. Consequently, the school often becomes a political symbol--a lingering vestige of local autonomy.

School History

Traditionally, education in Iowa has been a local matter. Early state law gave townships the educational responsibilities. The townships were usually divided into nine sub-districts with provision that each maintain a school. When certain sub-districts failed to maintain schools, the township emerged as the important school administrative unit.

As communities grew, independent village school districts arose within the townships. This meant that two types of school districts evolved--the village district and the open country district.

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Present day school problems in Greene County are rooted in the past. Between 1870 and 1900, the population of the county grew from 4,627 to 17,820. There was every reason to suppose that the schools would grow. The rise of many village-based independent schools and the maintenance of open country schools appeared justified.

This arrangement was adequate for educational tasks at the turn of the century, but it could not endure when population began to decline and when the automobile made its appearance.

Beginning around 1920, a low rural population density, rising costs and uneven quality of instruction pointed to a need for consolidation of school districts. But reluctance was widespread. Many persons in rural districts feared increased taxes would result from larger districts. Rural community pride was also at stake.

Most school districts were preserved, although some schools within the districts were abandoned. Districts with no high schools allocated a part of their funds to districts with high schools. This was the beginning of the tuition system, which delayed school reorganization. Thus, over the years virtual consolidation was promoted in the secondary schools, through tuition arrangements, while the rural system was maintained on the primary level. As late as 1945, Greene County had 45 rural primary schools, each of which had a daily attendance of less than 10 pupils.

This was the typical pattern of school districts in Greene County through the years. Gradually, there was reduction in the number of school units with only minimum reduction of school districts. In some cases, districts existed only on paper, having administrative functions but no teaching staff.

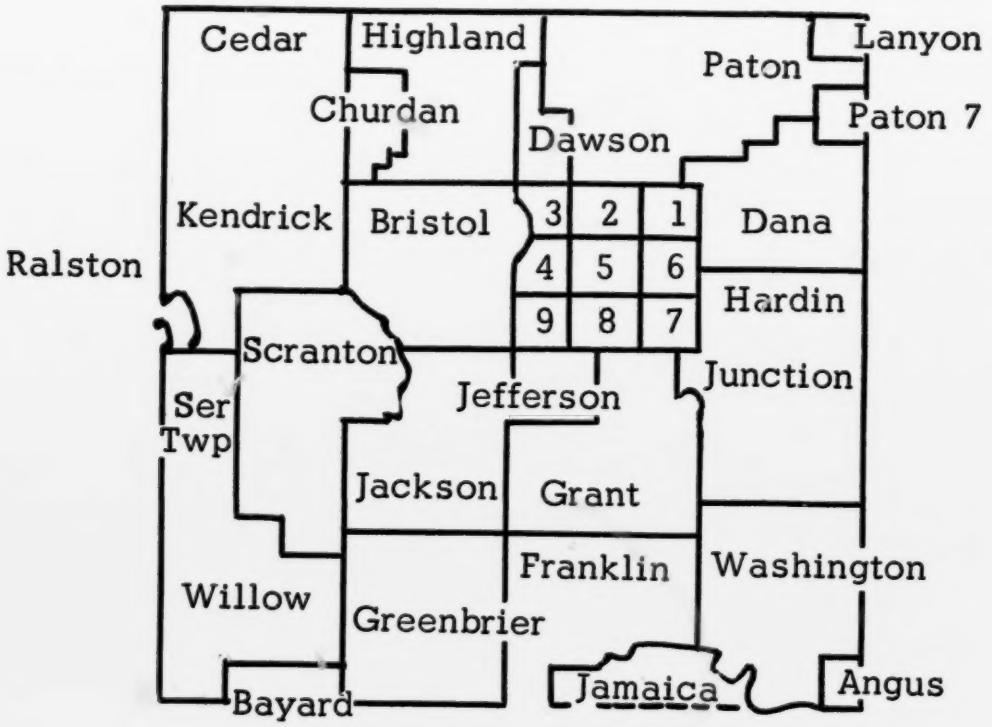
Type of District	1943-1944			1950-1951			1956-1957		
	Number of Districts	Number Attendance Units Open	Number of Schools	Number of Districts	Number Attendance Units Open	Number of Schools	Number of Districts	Number Attendance Units Open	Number of Schools
Group I-high schools:									
Independent	2	2	6	2	2	6	1	1	6
Consolidated	6	6	18	6	6	18	7	7	18
Subtotal	8	8	24	8	8	24	8	8	24
Group II-no high school									
Township	10	10	60	9	7	16	4	1	3
Rural Independent	10	6	6	11	-	-	11	-	-
Subtotal	20	16	66	20	7	16	15	1	3
County Totals	28	24	90	28	15	40	23	9	27

Table 1. Changes in Number of School Districts and Attendance Units in Greene County, Iowa 1943-1950-1956.

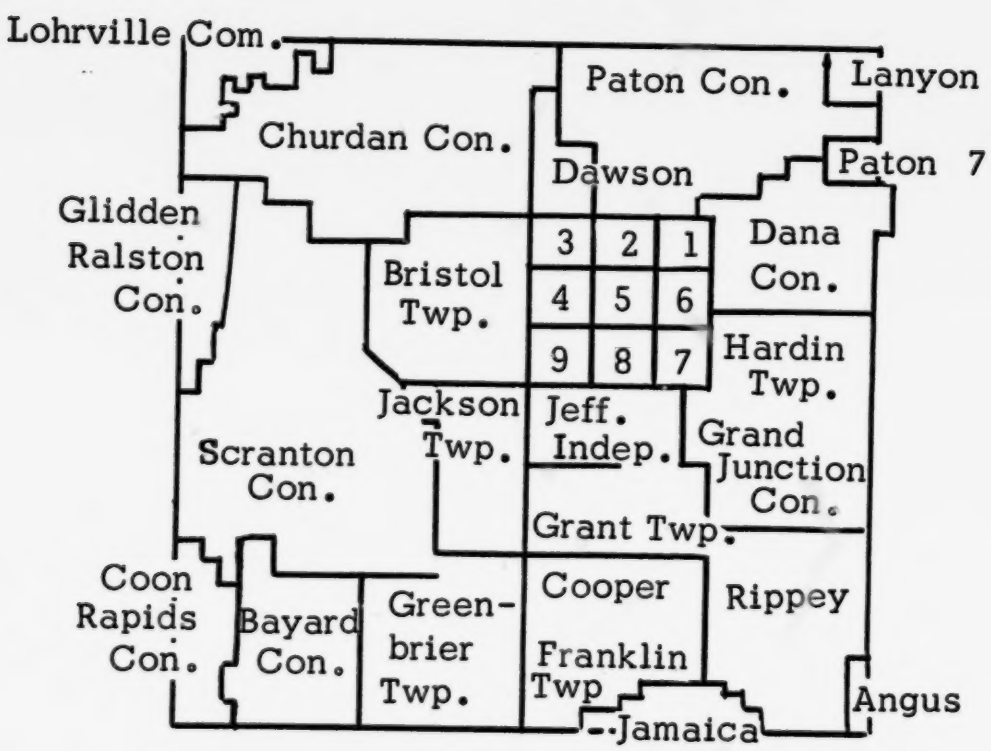
Table 1 illustrates the lag in the reduction of rural school districts behind the reduction of rural school attendance units. While the 66 attendance units operating in 1943 were reduced to 16 by 1950, only 5 of the 20 group II school districts were consolidated during the same period.

State legislative action in 1953 and 1957 tried to correct this situation. Laws provided that any district which could not support a high school would be incorporated into a larger district. Also, each district had to include at least 300 school age children.

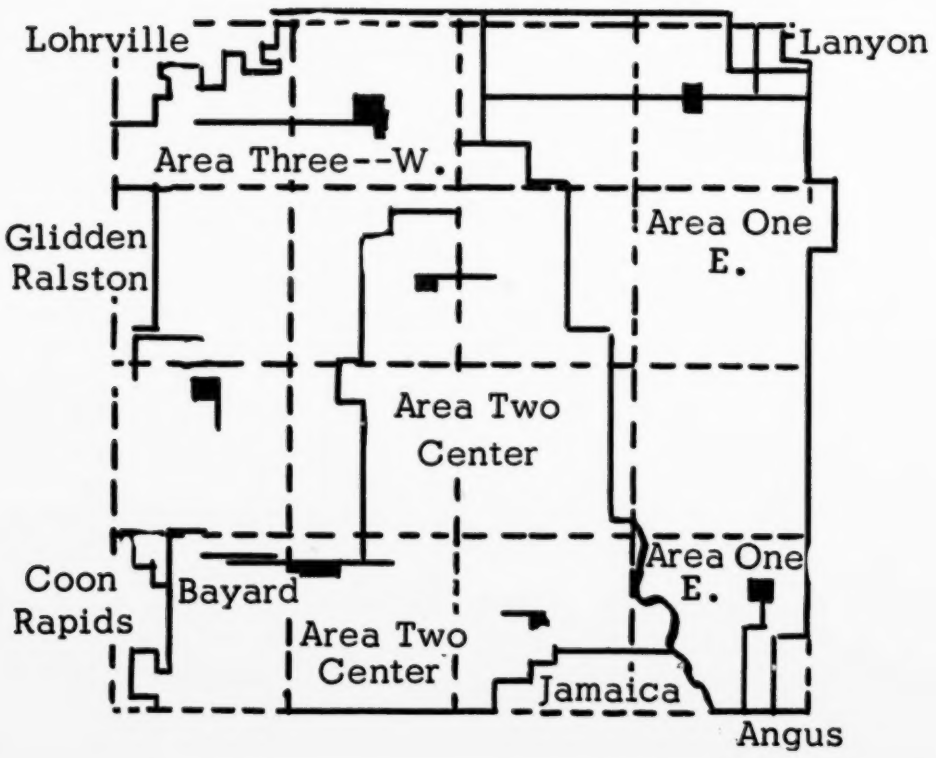
ORGANIZATION OF SCHOOL DISTRICTS



Greene County, Iowa
1950



Greene County School Districts
1958



School Districts 1962
(proposed)

Effects of Out-Migration

Generally speaking, the initiative for reorganizing Greene County school districts came from outside, not inside the county. The county's residents did not react to population decline but felt they could maintain their schools as they had before.

Young families, through their children, are usually the most school-minded group in a community. But out-migration tends frequently to remove this group. Consequently, school tasks are assumed or left to an older segment of the population.

The result is the partial loss of community ability to mobilize for effective community action. With older members, school boards are more traditionally minded. They are generally more attuned to past notions of education with little inclination to keep abreast of national trends. They tend to solve problems as they have been solved in the past.

The same situation may create some problems between school personnel and the community. The study revealed that young teachers in Greene County often felt that older, rural school board members were not sympathetic to their needs or interested enough in school affairs.

Enrollment Effects

The effects of out-migration are most sharply noted in school enrollments.

First grade classes entering Greene County schools in 1950 lost 35 percent of their members by the time they reached fifth grade. Likewise, the fifth grade

students of 1951 lost 26 percent of their classmates by the time they reached eighth grade.

These losses, called attrition, can be attributed directly to out-migration of families with school age children. Similar losses occurred in the high schools, but were smaller, since the younger families who migrate usually have more children. High school student dropouts did not account for a sizeable number of losses.

On the other hand, over-all enrollment in the county's schools was gradually rising during the period of study. This was due to increased birth rates which followed World War II.

All things considered, Greene County school enrollment did only slightly better than hold its own during the study period. Natural increases in enrollment were largely cancelled out by later attrition. Expected enrollment increases based on pre-school census findings did not occur, largely because out-migration obscured the actual picture.

Table 2. Greene County School Attendance (1950-57) 1/

	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Total	9	10	11	12	13	Grand Total
1950-51	262	327	295	245	260	258	249	245	248	2,389	230	239	177	166	808	3,197
1951-52	296	316	278	313	232	248	243	255	230	2,412	235	224	205	159	823	3,235
1952-53	314	319	289	255	293	219	243	240	237	2,409	216	232	211	189	848	3,257
1953-54	319	356	285	281	227	285	212	243	220	2,428	233	202	219	200	854	3,282
1954-55	327	358	332	301	280	237	280	218	238	2,571	224	228	202	195	849	3,420
1955-56	287	381	315	316	278	259	234	258	211	2,539	234	207	221	180	842	3,381
1956-57	348	356	324	314	311	278	263	223	241	2,658	208	213	204	201	826	3,484
1957	289	331	310	278	289	277	268	238	208	2,488	238	192	197	192	819	3,307

1/ The flow lines in the table show the effects of dropouts and out-migration.

Student-Teacher Ratios

Despite out-migration, the teaching staffs of county schools were enlarged during the study. But with little exception, personnel increases barely kept ahead of enrollment increases.

In anticipation of consolidation, certain schools began to hire more teachers. Accordingly, by the end of the study student-teacher ratios (pupils per teacher) had improved. It is not known whether further out-migration will maintain the low student-teacher ratios or whether consolidation will raise them.

	Enrollments							
	Census Enumeration		Elementary		High School		Totals	
	1950	1961	1950	1961	1950	1961	1950	1961
Jefferson	905	1,679	278	369	686	1,207	964	1,576
Scranton	377	544	111	119	297	328	408	447
Grand Junction	373	542	117	126	221	299	338	425

Table 3. School Enrollments in Three Selected Greene County Communities -- 1950-1961.

	Numbers of Teachers				Student-Teacher Ratios			
	Elementary		High School		Elementary		Secondary	
	1950	1961	1950	1961	1950	1961	1950	1961
Jefferson	17	22	20	51	16.3	16.7	34.3	23.6
Scranton	8	11	9	15	13.8	10.8	33.0	21.8
Grand Junction	9	11	10	19	13.0	11.[illegible]	22.1	15.7

Table 4. Changes in Numbers of Teachers and Student-Teacher Ratios in Three Selected Communities; 1950-1961.

Ordinarily, an elementary school enrollment of 400 is necessary to support a secondary enrollment of 200. Since nearly all of the county's school districts failed to meet this standard during the study, it was concluded that efforts by these schools to improve facilities and increase teaching staffs were largely stop-gap measures for temporary solutions to perennial problems. These measures markedly increased school costs.

Problems Created

In three school systems surveyed, interviews were conducted with the personnel. Both chronic and new school problems were noted.

School System A

The most pressing problem in terms of facilities was the lack of space and the absence of plans for expansion. Some classrooms were crowded and received excessive multiple use. Library equipment and extra-curricular activities were either lacking or underdeveloped.

The most critical problem was teacher-administrator and administrator-school board relations. Teachers felt that their professional interests and salary schedules were neglected by administrators. Administrators suggested that the school board, composed almost entirely of rural residents, was insufficiently

aware or concerned about school affairs. Teacher and administrator turn-over was high.

Low salaries increased recruitment problems. Teacher morale was low. Some teachers indicated that the community offers little in terms of recreation, community activity and social life.

Further, the lack of vocational counselling, up-dated courses and specialized teachers hindered effective school programs. Teachers suggested that the community was unresponsive to school needs, and that community action and support was woefully lacking.

School System B

Limited space and facilities were critical here. Needed building expansion had been postponed, since reorganization was expected to remove the problem.

Teacher recruitment was extremely difficult. Young, unmarried teachers were reluctant to remain in the community for its lack of recreational life and community activity. Salaries were low.

Teacher-administrator relations were satisfactory, but teachers felt that the rural school board was too conservative, reluctant to take action and unmindful of school needs.

School System C

Consolidation in this system had heightened problems of space, facilities and expansion. Financial support was lagging, creating serious problems in salaries, curriculum and expansion.

Student drop-out rates were high, and morale was less than satisfactory. Despite reorganization plans, which would give the system even more responsibility, community interest and support were lacking.

Teacher recruitment was no problem at the time of study, and teacher-administrator relations were satisfactory. Teacher turn-over was relatively low.

The Local Dilemma

With this background, perhaps the best description of the Greene County school system during the study is "caught in a squeeze."

On one side, the schools are increasingly expected to conform to standards set by the state. And as indicated by the interviews, teachers felt that local residents were not concerned enough with school problems.

On the other side, the school boards were faced with declining tax bases. School functions have been expanded, but they must be met mostly with limited local means.

The success with which Greene and other counties meet the school squeeze largely depends upon four factors. These have influenced past directions, just as they will affect the future.

(1) The degree to which existing elementary and secondary schools can be used as an expanded center in county-wide reorganization.

(2) The possibility of creating districts with a population that will sustain enrollments and meet financial requirements over the years.

(3) The solving of transportation problems with the time and money available.

(4) The ability of new districts to recruit and hold teaching and administrative personnel, to provide required facilities and to up-grade curricula.

APPENDIX

A word about the larger study

The 1950-1960 decade was one of unprecedented population growth for the United States, but despite this growth about half of the nation's counties lost population during this period. Such tremendous population redistribution does not occur without far-reaching social and economic consequences.

This population movement and its social and economic consequences are the subject of a larger regional study of which the Greene County, Iowa, study forms but one part. The larger study was initiated by members of the North Central Technical Committee - Number 18 (NC - 18), which is composed of population analysts from the states of the North Central Region and Kentucky. The NC - 18 committee first charted the actual population changes for the region, and the results of this analysis may be found in the first two regional publications cited in the bibliography.

The next step in the NC - 18 regional program was to initiate a series of field studies, on the county level, to determine the effects of population change upon the social institutions of the counties which had experienced various kinds and amounts of migration. The counties were selected on the basis of the direction and amount of net migration which had occurred in the 1940-1950 decade, the extent of industrialization (as measured by the per cent of the labor force employed in manufacturing), and the local condition of agriculture (as measured

by farm operator level-of-living index). Research was initiated in counties selected according to the above criteria. The following three combinations were investigated:

(1) High out-migration, low farm operator level of living, and low industrial development (Out-lo-lo): Aitkin County, Minnesota; Price County, Wisconsin; Ontonogan County, Michigan; and Marshall County, South Dakota.

(2) High out-migration, high farm operator level of living, and low industrial development (Out-hi-lo): Greene County, Iowa.

(3) High in-migration, high farm operator level of living, and high industrial development (In-hi-hi): Franklin County, Ohio, and Kenosha County, Wisconsin.

A regional report is being prepared which will summarize the results of the individual county studies.

The selected bibliography which follows is presented for the benefit of those who may wish to gain a better appreciation of the regional population situation and the results of varying degrees of migration upon counties with differing industrial and agricultural conditions.

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